



12 February 2007

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## Secretary-General's bulletin

### Record-keeping and the management of United Nations archives

The Secretary-General, for the purpose of ensuring the effective and efficient management of United Nations records and archives, promulgates the following:

#### Section 1

##### Definitions

The following definitions shall apply for the purposes of the present bulletin. Several of the definitions come from section 1 of Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2004/15, on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources and data, and are repeated here for convenience:

- (a) *Archives*: records to be permanently preserved for their administrative, fiscal, legal, historical or informational value;<sup>1</sup>
- (b) *Authorized user*: any staff member who is authorized to use ICT resources;
- (c) *Disposition*: the action taken with regard to non-current records following their appraisal, including transfer to secondary storage, or destruction;
- (d) *Electronic record*: a record that consists of ICT data and that has:
  - (i) *Structure*: the format of the electronic record and any links to attachments or other related documents;
  - (ii) *Content*: the information contained in the structure of the electronic record conveying the evidence of the transaction;
  - (iii) *Context*: the information documenting the source in terms of the transaction to which it relates, such as creator, date, security and access, language, disposal and format of the electronic record, and which is normally separated in the structure from the content;

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the present bulletin, the archives of the United Nations are those of the United Nations Organization, regardless of physical location, and archives of pre-existing organizations for which the Secretariat is custodian, paper-based and electronic records that should be preserved because of their administrative, fiscal, legal, historical or informational value as evidence of the official business of the United Nations.



(e) *E-mail or electronic mail records*: any messages created, sent or received within an e-mail system during the course of official business;

(f) *ICT resource*: any tangible or intangible asset capable of generating, transmitting, receiving, processing or representing data in electronic form, where the asset is owned, licensed, operated, managed or made available by, or otherwise used by, the United Nations;

(g) *ICT data*: any data or information, regardless of form or medium, which are or have been electronically generated by, transmitted via, received by, processed by or represented in an ICT resource;

(h) *Non-current record*: any data or information no longer needed for daily use in the transaction of official business but to be retained for a fixed period of time;

(i) *Official use*: use of ICT resources by an authorized user in the discharge of his or her official functions and within the scope of his or her authorization;

(j) *Record (or official record)*: any data or information, regardless of form or medium, maintained by the United Nations as evidence of a transaction;

(k) *Record-keeping*: making, maintaining and disposing of complete, accurate and reliable evidence of transactions in the form of records;

(l) *Retention schedule*: a comprehensive instruction developed by a department or an office covering the disposition of records to ensure that they are retained for as long as necessary based on their administrative, fiscal, legal, historical or informational value;

(m) *Transaction*: act by a staff member using an ICT resource in the discharge of his or her official functions;

(n) *Transitory record*: any data or information required for only a limited time to ensure the completion of a routine action or the preparation of a subsequent record;

(o) *Vital record*: any data or information essential for the ongoing functioning of the Organization and without which the Organization could not continue to function effectively or without which it could not ensure business continuity in the event of a disaster; information necessary to protect the rights and interests of the Organization, its staff and those who interact with it.

## **Section 2**

### **Purpose and scope**

The present bulletin sets out the rules and procedures to be followed in respect of the creation, management and disposition of records, electronic records, archives and non-current records of the United Nations. It also sets out the procedures regarding access to United Nations archives and non-current records. The bulletin should be read in conjunction with Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2007/6, on information sensitivity, classification and handling.

### **Section 3**

#### **Responsibilities of staff members**

3.1 All records, including electronic records and e-mail records, created or received by a staff member in connection with or as a result of the official work of the United Nations, are the property of the United Nations.

3.2 Staff members shall not alter, destroy, misplace or render useless any official document, record or file that is intended to be kept as a record of the Organization. Staff members are permitted to destroy documents and records in keeping with the provisions of retention policy guidelines that have been approved by the Archives and Records Management Section.

3.3 Prior to separation from service, staff members shall make arrangements for transferring to the Archives and Records Management Section or to the office with delegated authority, those records in their possession which are no longer required for business purposes and shall not remove any records from United Nations premises. The Chief of the Archives and Records Management Section may provide advice regarding the records of a staff member prior to separation from service. Staff members shall be entitled to have a reasonable number of unrestricted records copied at their own expense and to retain their private papers. Guidelines concerning the separation of private papers from business records are set out in the annex to the present bulletin.

### **Section 4**

#### **Responsibilities of departments and offices**

4.1 Departments and offices shall develop and implement a policy regarding the retention of their records, including transitory records, through a records retention schedule subject to approval by the Archives and Records Management Section. Records retention schedules shall provide for accountable and transparent record-keeping, insofar as they shall identify minimum retention periods for records to meet administrative, fiscal and legal requirements; they shall also identify records to be retained as archives of the Organization. United Nations records that are not covered by an approved retention policy must not be destroyed.

4.2 Prior to transferring their records to the Archives and Records Management Section, departments and offices shall prepare them for transfer in accordance with the format established by the Chief of the Archives and Records Management Section.

4.3 With the exception of transitory records, departments and offices may not dispose of records in their possession without specific authorization in a retention schedule or the signed authorization of the Chief of the Archives and Records Management Section.

4.4 Departments and offices authorized to retain non-current records beyond the normal period for the conduct of their official business shall establish suitable conditions for the maintenance and preservation of those records, in accordance with standards approved by the Archives and Records Management Section.

4.5 Departments and offices shall develop procedures to identify and manage their vital records as part of overall Secretariat disaster recovery and business continuity

planning, in keeping with the guidelines to identify vital records established by the Archives and Records Management Section.

4.6 Departments and offices shall respond to requests for access to and declassification of records made by units.

4.7 In the event of the closure of a department or office, including field operations, its archives and records shall be transferred to the Archives and Records Management Section, in accordance with procedures established for that purpose.

## **Section 5**

### **Responsibilities of the Archives and Records Management Section**

5.1 The Archives and Records Management Section shall be responsible for establishing policy and setting standards, including the design of record-keeping systems and procedures for the management of the records and archives of the United Nations, including their use, storage, retention and disposition and access rights. The Archives and Records Management Section shall also establish policy and standards for the structure, content and context of electronic records, in order to ensure that they are accurately created and captured in their integrity and preserved without alteration and remain accessible for as long as the electronic record is retained.

5.2 In consultation with the originating office, the Archives and Records Management Section shall determine, by a system of appraisal, which records have sufficient historical or other value to warrant their continued preservation as archives of the United Nations.

5.3 The Archives and Records Management Section shall develop procedures to facilitate the appropriate identification, handling and management of sensitive records to prevent unauthorized use and/or disclosure of sensitive information and to control authorized disclosure of sensitive information issued by the United Nations, in accordance with Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2007/6, on information sensitivity, classification and handling.

5.4 Although the daily responsibility for maintenance of all records rests with the various departments and offices, the Chief of the Archives and Records Management Section, or his or her representative, may inspect existing records management systems and prescribe changes and/or improvements in those systems as may be required.

5.5 The Archives and Records Management Section shall undertake the transfer from departments and offices, to its premises or delegated premises away from Headquarters, archives and non-current records which are more than three years old. In exceptional cases, where shorter or longer retention periods are deemed desirable, a schedule mutually agreed upon by the Archives and Records Management Section and the departments and offices concerned may be established.

5.6 With the authorization of the departments and offices concerned, the Archives and Records Management Section shall dispose of non-current records that have no further administrative, fiscal, legal, historical or informational value.

## **Section 6**

### **Electronic records**

6.1 Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2004/15, on the use of information and communication technology resources and data, defines appropriate uses of information technology and related resources and data. Electronic records created or managed using a United Nations ICT resource shall be subject to the requirements for record-keeping set forth in the present bulletin, including their capture in electronic record-keeping systems; if such a system is not yet available, electronic records must be captured and maintained in an alternative record-keeping system, for example, one that is paper-based.

6.2 E-mail has become an important business and communication tool in the United Nations and many of the e-mail messages created and received by the Organization constitute records because they provide evidence of and information about its business transactions. Departments and offices shall ensure that e-mail records are identified, managed and stored in accordance with the requirements for record-keeping set forth in the present bulletin. Departments and offices shall be required to develop and disseminate guidelines, in keeping with business process and practice, to prescribe appropriate use of e-mail systems as a means of official communication.

## **Section 7**

### **Access of staff members to non-current records and United Nations archives**

7.1 Staff members shall have access to archives and non-current records necessary to conduct their official business, subject to the terms and conditions established by the Secretary-General.

7.2 Records on which the Secretary-General or his authorized representatives have imposed restrictions may be declassified at any time by the same authority. Records that remain restricted when transferred to the Archives and Records Management Section will be declassified automatically or be subject to a declassification review when 20 years old. Those remaining restricted after 20 years shall undergo further declassification reviews at five-year intervals.

## **Section 8**

### **Final provisions**

8.1 The provisions of the present bulletin shall not apply to the record-keeping and management of records specifically covered in other Secretary-General's bulletins, other administrative issuances promulgated by the Secretary-General or legal undertakings made by the Organization to third parties.

8.2 Administrative instruction ST/AI/326, on the United Nations archives, is hereby abolished.

8.3 The present bulletin shall enter into force on 15 February 2007.

(Signed) **Ban Ki-moon**  
Secretary-General

## **Annex**

### **Guidelines concerning the separation of private papers from business records**

1. The purpose of the present annex is to provide guidelines for the separation of staff members' private papers from business records.
2. Records created or received by staff members in connection with, or as a result of, the official work of the United Nations are the property of the United Nations.
3. The following categories of records are considered private papers of staff members:
  - (a) Personal notes and diaries;
  - (b) Surplus copies of non-classified United Nations printed documents;
  - (c) Personal correspondence with no connection to a staff member's official functions, even though filed in a Secretariat office, including social invitations, acknowledgements, correspondence lists and other purely social matters.
4. Upon retirement, staff members may remove the private papers specified in paragraph 3 above.